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SUBJECT: MULTI-PARTY COOPERATION ON THE BAGHDAD PROVINCIAL
COUNCIL

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Classified By: Classified by Baghdad PRT Team Leader Tom Lynch for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

THIS IS A BAGHDAD PRT MESSAGE.

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: The Baghdad Provincial Council (PC) was reborn in 2009 as a remarkably inclusive body. In a deliberate repudiation of its predecessor's sectarian outlook, it has adopted a non-partisan approach that emphasizes institutional priorities. The national elections will strain this approach, but it is likely to survive them. Given the institutional rivalries, the most important effect of the national elections will be upon the national government's relationship with the PC. Currently, the Provincial Council (PC) Chairman is of the same party as the Prime Minister. Even so, their relationship is occasionally stained, notably over the 'Amin (mayor of Baghdad) and the Baghdad Operations Center (BOC). If the Prime Minister should change, especially to another party, such as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (ISCI), it would likely worsen the relationship between the PC and the national government. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

Provincial Elections

[2](#). (C) The first Baghdad Provincial Council (PC) was elected in 2005, concurrent with the first national elections. The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq party (SCIRI, now known as ISCI), swept the election, taking 28 of the then 51 PC seats. The PC engaged in a four-year campaign to monopolize the organs of local government (ref C). It installed a senior Badr Organization commander as governor, engaged in a running dispute with the local councils over authority and funding, successfully eliminated the rival Baghdad City Council and Baghdad Rural Council and evicted (literally) the 'Amin (mayor) of Baghdad, installing a SCIRI/ISCI partisan in his place.

[3](#). (C) PRT assesses that the 2005 PC was not able to govern effectively. Local services crumbled under the pressure of insurgency, ineffective administration, and rampant corruption. Although services are administered by national ministries and the Amanat, the primary service provider for Baghdad and its leader, the 'Amin, the PC has oversight responsibility. The public saw the PC as partisan, ineffective, and corrupt.

[4](#). (U) In the 2009 provincial elections, candidates campaigned heavily and successfully on nationalist, good governance, non-sectarian platforms. The chief winner in this election was the Da'wa party, which took 28 of the now 57 seats, giving it one seat shy of a majority (ref B). Secularist and Sunni-identified parties also did well, as did

the Sadrist Trend. The chief loser was ISCI, which dropped to only three seats. The net result was a great increase in party and religious diversity. For example, Sunni representation on the Council went from one member to at least 12, and a Christian and Sabeen member were each elected to a (reserved) seat.

Post-Election Reordering

¶15. (U) The new PC selected Da'wa member Dr. Sabah Abdul Razak as the Governor and Da'wa member Kamil Nassir al-Zaidi as the Chairman. Under Chairman Zaidi, the PC was reorganized explicitly for the purpose being inclusive and technocratic. The change started at the top. Dr. Riyadh al-'Adhahd was selected to serve as the Deputy Chairman. Adhahd is a prominent Sunni politician who served on the defunct Baghdad City Council and spent 2005 to 2008 in exile in Sweden. Of the 25 PC committees, chairmanships were distributed among the various parties in proportion to their presence on the PC. Chairmanships were also (for the most part) directed towards qualified individuals. The chair of the Economic Committee went to the Sabeen member, who had worked for four decades in industry. Education went to a college professor, health to a doctor, construction to an architect, essential services to an engineer.

¶16. (C) Some exceptions, however, occurred. Da'wa reserved several key committees to itself, even when the member was not the best &technocractic8 choice. The Chair of the Security Committee's only professional experience is as a high school principal. Also, Chairman Zaidi created a new

position of General Secretary (Arabic) Amin 'Am) which was given to Councilman Mohammed Yusuf al-Mubarqa, a Da'wa stalwart. The General Secretary (and not the Deputy Chairman) is in charge of all PC administrative matters.

¶17. (C) The most interesting exception is that of the Sadrist chair of the Legal Committee, Sabaar 'Ali al-Saidi. The Sadrists, with their seven council seats, demanded and received the chairmanship of the Legal Committee. However, the most gifted lawyer on the PC is Dr. 'Abbas Mahdi al-Hamdani, a Sunni member of the Mutlaq group (IFND), who was instead given the Chairmanship of the Agriculture Committee. Hamdani is considered by many (including PRT Staff) to be one of the brightest and most energetic members of the PC. Chairman Zaidi recognized this, works with him closely and appointed him to the position of Legal Advisor to the PC; a position created explicitly to allow Hamdani to fill it.

Multi-Partisanship In Action

¶10. (U) In conversations with PC members, current and former, and individuals outside of the PC, such as DC members and LGP personnel, the new membership has been described as much more energetic, professional and inclusive. Examples abound. The opening invocation at general meetings rotates among members, Sunni and Shi'a, and the Chairman is careful to rotate which members sit close to him at general meetings to reflect a balance of parties and personalities. The PC rarely votes on matters, but when it does, the vote is always either unanimous or close to it.

¶11. (C) A more substantial example comes from the Grand Committees. The Grand Committees are a creation of the 2009 PC designed to investigate service provision in the city and surrounding exurban and rural areas. They consist of a small group of members (4-8 members) who visit various areas and perform spot inspections, hold public meetings and coordinate with local officials. They include members from the area being inspected, as well as members from different neighborhoods and a mix of parties and ethnicity. (COMMENT: Given that being a member of the wrong sect in the wrong

neighborhood could get you killed 18 months ago, this willingness to publicly work in cross-sectarian groups is a significant mark of improvement in security and reconciliation in Baghdad. END COMMENT.)

The Real Enemy) Other Local Institutions

¶12. (U) In contrast, the PC's tensest political relationships have been with other government institutions, regardless of political or ethnic affiliation. The primary service provider for Baghdad is the Amanat, and its leader, the 'Amin, is often called the Mayor of Baghdad. This is an inexact description of his role, but he is one of the most important officials in the province. He is also a cabinet-level minister with direct access to the Prime Minister. The current 'Amin, Saber al- Essawi, installed by the 2005 PC and subsequently blessed by the Prime Minister, is a member of ISCI and was, in fact, the candidate in the 2009 provincial elections who won the most votes. He chose to retain his position as 'Amin rather than serve as the leader of the rump ISCI party on the new PC. The relationship between the Amanat and the PC has steadily deteriorated since last summer. Poor Amanat service execution, allegations (and outright proof) of corruption and incompetence, weak municipal service responses to the major bombings of the last few months, and mutual resentment have largely poisoned this relationship. Complicating the situation, the 'Amin is legally a cabinet member and reports to the Prime Minister, not the PC or Governor.

¶13. (C) The local councils' battles with the 2005 PC did not cease with the election of a new, politically distinct PC. From the perspective of the new PC, the District Advisory Councils (DACs) and Neighborhood Advisory Councils (NACs) remain a CPA-sponsored institution, riddled to varying degrees with corruption. The largely secular members of the local councils feel that they simply exchanged a PC dominated by one religious party (ISCI) for one dominated by another religious party (Da'wa). In fact, the relationship grew even more strained. The Provincial Powers Law (PPL) has given the PC explicit authority over the councils; authority it is happy to use. While the PC will preserve (and potentially co-opt) the councils, it will do so on its terms. Not surprisingly, the local councils in turn feel under siege. Again, this relationship is driven by institutional realities, not party or ethnic ones. PC members from all parties describe the local councils as needing reform, even

though several PC members previously served as local council members. COR legislation passed January 25 promises to ameliorate some of the strain by securing local councils positions and pensions, but is unlikely to remove it entirely.

¶14. (C) One notably antagonistic relationship was between the PC as a whole and the former BOC commander, LTG 'Abud Qanbar (reftel A). In the wake of the October 25 bombing, the PC demanded his dismissal in no uncertain terms. Like the 'Amin, however, the BOC commander serves at the pleasure of the Prime Minister. It was not until the December 8 bombings, when Qanbar's position became untenable, that he was transferred (not dismissed). While the PC-BOC relationship has improved under Qanbar's successor, LTG Hashim 'Auda, it remains prickly.

To the Hustings. . .

¶15. (C) The pressures of the national elections began to be felt in the late fall. For example, the PC's proposed redistricting plan was delayed until after the elections. While nominally a local matter, any Baghdad redistricting will involve the national government and likely require CoR approval. This topic was being discussed at the same time as the CoR negotiations over the Election Law and PC members

felt that it was too complicated politically to be addressed prior to the elections.

¶16. (C) The sign that the election campaign had truly arrived at the PC came on November 10 from Councilmember Mu'in al-Kadhimi (ISCI). Councilman Kadhimi was the chairman of the 2005 PC and one of the few survivors of the 2009 ISCI electoral collapse. However, once elected to the council, he showed virtually no involvement. He joined no committees and only appeared at the building for the weekly general meeting (NOTE: Attendance at the general meeting is taken and is required to get paid and remain a member. END NOTE). When at the general meetings, he almost never spoke. On November 10, the day after the first version of the election law was passed, however, he spoke for over an hour. He began doing media interviews in the building and soon ran in and won the ISCI parliamentary primaries. Several other members became immediately and noticeably more engaged and visible.

¶17. (U) Media attention at the PC has risen. At the general meeting on Jan 19, at least six television cameras were present, along with print and radio reporters. Members were unusually lively, and appeared to be playing to the press, especially those who are running in the election.

New PM, New Relationship?

¶18. (C) The GOI has a vested interest in the capital and frequently intervenes in nominally local issues. This national level intervention naturally causes friction with the local government. The PC Chair, the Governor and the current PM are all members of Da'wa. This has not prevented this friction. The PC Chairman has complained to the PRT that while the PM will meet with him, he does not receive sufficient support. Chairman Zaidi specifically cited his ongoing feud with the 'Amin. The Chairman would like the PM to fire the 'Amin, but reports that the PM refused to do so because of national political considerations.

¶21. (C) COMMENT: If the Chairman has a difficult relationship with a PM who is a member of his party, it is likely that a new PM from a different party (especially the 'Amin's party, ISCI), would compound these difficulties. The institutional relationship is fraught enough without the added pressure of cross-cutting political interests. END COMMENT.
Qcross-cutting political interests. END COMMENT.

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